My Only Child

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MY ONLY CHILD

MY ONLY CHILD

POEMS

IN HER MEMORY

BY

EDMUND JAMES MILLS

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IN MEMORY

OF

MY ONLY CHILD

EDITH MARY

BORN MARCH 25TH, 1869

DIED FEBRUARY 29TH, 1884

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PREFACE

Over your resting-place,
Marble and ivygrace,
'Neath the sad western height,
Watch through the day and night.

Mute 'mid the life of men
My sorrow lives, as when
First in the chamber, dear,
Death shook his dreadful spear.

Marble will melt away,
Leaf at the frost decay,
Father's heart cease to beat;
Where then your memory, sweet?

Better than any stone,
Better than heart my own,
Better than leaf that fades,
This is my little maid's.

PREFACE

All must die soon, I see,
Save love and poesie;
Therefore my builded song
Surely will last for long.

Thus, when my day is o'er,
And we have met once more,
Others will keep your name
Fresh as when first you came.

In this old tale of grief
They too will find relief;
Blessing will meet them there,
Peace and a soul at prayer,

Hope and the slanted beam
From those white heavens that seem
Far,—till Love, bending low,
Lifts the veil; then we know.

MY ONLY CHILD

IN HER BED

(MORNING)

Cosy and warm she lies, a pictured rest,
Her soft cheek pillowed by her angel's hands.
How still the reverent air around her stands!
She sleeps, sleeps well, within this dainty nest.
White are the garments of the pure and blest
Who dwell at endless peace in holy lands;
White is her soul that, still in mortal bands,
Makes sport of time, and is not long distrest.
O darling slumberer, wake with lark and morn;
Wake up, and let thy merry laughter peal
All through the day, and back to evening's hour.
You are our sacred joy; and when the scorn,
The bitterness of the great world we feel,
Here is one deep reserve of love and power.

IN MEMORY OF

IN HER BED

(EVENING)

'Do come and see me in my little bed ;
When I am ready, I will call you,—so.'
Then, as she called, I left my book to go,
And sate beside her. Many things we said.
I told her,—kissing, stroking that fair head,—
Of elves and fairies, all their love and woe ;
Of the big world outside ; and she would know
How my day passed, what I had done and read.
Her voice fell fainter. Soft as wind that dies
On distant reaches of a summer sea,
Where the last echo wanes, the light is late,—
So sleep drew downward on those sacred eyes,
With utter peace from by Nirvana's gate.
The peace that came upon her came on me.

LOVE-WORK

A LITTLE packet lay
Each morning in my way ;
  Luncheon was inside,
  Nothing seemed amiss :
But, when it was opened wide,
  Ah ! I found a kiss.

Such was her tender care
My heart should have sweet fare
  In its daily lot.
  She had somehow known
Man's deep nature liveth not,
  Not by bread alone.

IN MEMORY OF

A GAME

One night I was reading
In my big chair,
Never was heeding
My little one there.
Begging for fun,
She covered my book
With her hands one by one;
I knew by her look,
I must unbend;
Then off she ran
And the frolic began;
Oh, what a chase!
How did it end?
With a kiss on her face.

MY ONLY CHILD

THE MESSAGE

Such presage as I had went lightly by
As softest down the wind may waft and veer ;
I marked nought in thy vigil of the year,
Nor later, when the snows began to dry.
Not in the hush of doubt, the smothered sigh,
When all grew dark with falling leaves of fear
Stripped by the hateful wind, as That drew near,—
Not then did I first know that she must die.
Once I went home, as wont. A sudden burst
Of love immeasurable filled my heart,—
A yearning with a cry, unknown before.
There stood the summit ; I knew, last and first,
What is this anguish borne alone, apart.
Death came upon my child and me no more.

IN MEMORY OF

HER DEATH

When the first shadow of her illness came,
Her heart sought mine ere the dark stress drew near;
In the still chamber, with none else to hear,
She bade me call her by her own pet name.
Two words I once had shaped with careless aim,
Words now to me so infinitely dear;
Strength went with them, and love that casts out fear,—
New strength, new love, to meet the new-made claim.
We watched the drifting day, the lingering night,
Pain there was not, but weary work of breath;
One afternoon appeared the parting grace:—
A riven cloud, a breadth of holy light,
A smile most sweet, beyond the taint of death;
The morrow's morn I found it on her face.

MY ONLY CHILD

THE LAST KISS

THERE lies my dear one in her funeral dress,
A last smile lingering on these muted lips;
The eyes, once bright, are in a dark eclipse;
Her cold cheek answers not to my caress.
This is a woe beyond all might to bless.
Now, my strayed child another love-cup sips;
Or, maybe, in that River now she dips
For a first draught of still forgetfulness.
What shall I do, who would not have thee die?
This grief is at the heart, and not for tears;
Upon my face the mask must soon be set.
I have come in to say a last good-bye,
To arm me for the dint of lonely years.
Sweet, take my pledge that I shall not forget.

IN MEMORY OF

MY SONNET

Sweet dainty measure! He by Sorga wending
Found thee in bud, like his own noble maid.
I ever dwell within his laurel's shade,
His love and lore upon my own impending.
Wilt thou fare forth, one aim of thought, now lending
To those who sing, now those who grieve, thine aid;
From first to last a growing flame displayed,
Or a strong voice that wanes, in whispers ending?
Sweetest to me, because that life I knew
(On which, perhaps, eternal silence sleeps)
Was the pure living sonnet of my prime.
Fourteen blest years of love, unhidden, true,
That rose from least to great by bounds and leaps,
And fell before one cruel touch of time.

THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH

The dread assault had passed, and kindly night
That hides all woe, and would give rest, came on;
But starless cloudy night, with stealthy steps,
As at the advent of most secret things.
All sounds made worship; even the wild wind
Became a listener, and forgot to blow.

In the dark outer passage writhed a Shape,—
That Evil Shape of the black afternoon,—
And strove to enter. But, beside her door,
I saw, in glimmering garments fresh and white,
Two children-sentries, sisters as it seemed,
In likeness of herself. Upon their brows
Lay a most holy calm; the parted hair

Fell back in sweet and simple majesty,
Burning with awful gold; and their soft eyes
Were fixed inflexible, invincible:
Therefore he won not by them, and she lay
Within the chamber, certain and secure.

First, forth from nooks and crannies unbeknown,
Fared the dear little elves, who had been used
To tend her sleep and sport about her bed.
But, on this night, they crept up strange and wan,
As boding ill, and halted with wide looks,
And gazed with wrinkled foreheads from afar.
Then one, in visage like a queen, advanced
Walking on tiptoe till she reached her face,
And peeping turned half back the kerchief there.
Alas, the eyes now doomed to endless sleep!

Alas, the lips where that sad smile is set !
Alas, the breathless lips closed evermore !
So sobbing, with shamed head, came back the queen.
And she and all her tribe wailed silently,
And sidled round, and knelt, nor thought to leave
Until a muted clarion called them home.

Thereafter fell a multitudinous flight,
A wonted winnowing of weary wings,
As of birds late-returning nestwards, when
The light grows red and faint in summer skies,
And the great yearning throbs through all that lives.
These were her own thoughts that, on pinions bright,
Innumerable had left her. Mercy-thoughts,

IN MEMORY OF

Thoughts like far drift of music ; and, if gay,
Yet with a tinge of sadness : gentle thrills
Brothered with fearless faith and warmth of
love :
And arrowy lightnings shot from lifted eyes.
All these were hovering, poised for entry now
Where once they had been born, and whence
they sped ;
But every little door of sense was fast.
And, as fair birds returned to their own place,
Finding their broken nests on ravaged boughs,
Or circling vainly by the insulted eaves,
Utter their mournful cries and cannot rest ;
So these went fitfully and plained and moaned.
How long they bode, I have not, if indeed
They then departed. For in truth I feel
That they are with me often, and we hold
Ripe confidence of blessed memories.

Soon was a sough of wind, and in there came
By some way then unheeded a dim form,
That angel who had guarded her from birth;
But now with aspect half-averted, veiled,
And recognised by a swift wafted sign,
She, with a kiss and gasp, went outwardly.
Others there were, assessors who had stood
On watch and ward within remoter ways
Where that loved child had stayed (stayed, therefore loved).
These approached one by one, and wept, and kissed,
And passed with shrouded faces, deeply bent.

I heard the air stand hushed, and through it moved
A sacred pulse, such as leaves inmost worlds
When a great Power, invisible, draws near.

IN MEMORY OF

My mind, urged in by that diviner stress,
Turned all alert in homage. From before
This One proceeded a pure glow; most soft,
Most luminous, as when heaven's silver light
Pervades dark forests' depths; and a perfume
Of sweet white lilies (ah, how exquisite!)
Just caught the sense. But not with any wing
Or footfall came he. The intensive air
Seemed at one point irradiant, and anon
Grew more and more distinct to figure, till
I saw, and seeing more, I saw the King.
Oh, but I knew him! Many a happy time,
Since my young years first felt his dainty dint,
(Dear peril of new life) I have arisen
And have obeyed him. Oft o'er flowery meads
I have gone with him, and have drunk delight
From his full proffered cup by lake and stream,
And every summer mount and winter vale.

MY ONLY CHILD

His glory came to me with purple dawn
Whose beams it gave all brightness, and a joy
That revelled as unending. 'Neath his morn
(For it was his) I have lain down and basked
In absolute rapture ; felt his rosebuds pause
On my own lips ; and near dreamed life away.
He has come, too, at night, with solemn stars
That flashed the life of his fair jewels back,
With whispers, adumbrations of all bliss,
And drawn me on towards immortality.
Now I beheld him, hitherto unseen.
Alone he stood at the bed-foot,—so young
(For Love is ageless) and so beautiful :
But all his state was absent, and his robes
Hung as in direst sadness. Still he stood,
A God indeed ; but, as that dead child, still.
Fear kept me not ; yet a meet reverence
Drew down awhile my eyelids, till at last

More fain they parted, and my sight climbed up
And rose, and reached at length the Eternal Face.
O awful vision ! Beauty of the prime,
Whole and unstained as when, ere dreams had come
Of men and worlds athwart the makers' sleep,
He swayed blind matter into nearer rest :
And as when later Eden knew his flight
Impending in the cool, with smile and song :
Beauty,—but menaced now by Death and Hell.
The lamps shone not forth from those azure orbs
Nigh closed by gloomy curtains of the lids ;
And the sweet mouth seemed hard, and fixed, and firm,
—Nay, fixed not ; but o'ercome with sudden spasms
It quivered in unutterable grief.

In sooth, the light that first gleamed on his face
Had changed to act of darkness ; and the air,
That had been warm with him, grew bitter cold,—
As when a wind frets on, where follows snow
To hide, mayhap, some little child's new grave.
Slow drooped his forehead ; but a trembling tress
Fell forward, hiding what no mortal love,
No mortal love may witness. Ah ! the strength,
The terror of those sighs, as of a soul
Racked, wrestling with unconquerable wrong.
My heart and breath stopped, caught in the dread
suspense.
Time there was not, it seemed eternity.

O sight beyond all words ! O God, O Love !

Now, in one stillness, rose a faint soft sound
Æolian, deep and crescent, but most sweet,

IN MEMORY OF

In spheres of melody ; a dawn of peace
After that storm of sorrow. As it came,
Within its soothing tones, its winning grace,
I heard again my heart's long history told.
But, as it swelled and soared, it smote the King :
Slowly the heavenly head bent upright ; the warm glow
Of those grand locks streamed down the columned neck,
And the light gathered round him. Upon me
He laid a hand of comfort ; that one touch
Widened through all my being ; and his lips
Made kinship in ineffable farewells.
Moving as one who moves not, on he passed
Up to the bed-head, where that elf had left
The kerchief opened back. Smile unto smile
He kissed her ; and I saw, I felt him, low
Lingering with infinite benediction.

He turned, but left his light upon her face.
As he made forth, the children-sentries bowed
Silent obeisance : and so I marked
His gesture, and their charge *Until the morn.*

Thither I looked again, and on their brows
Lay a most holy calm ; the parted hair
Fell back in sweet and simple majesty,
Burning with awful gold.

IN MEMORY OF

ΑΥΤΟΥ ΓΑΡ ΕΣΜΕΝ ΠΟΙΗΜΑ

We are his poem,—we his words so sweet
That in calm measure through the ages flow ;
Our years his rimes that, wave-like, come and go,
The art all hidden and the thought complete.
We are his poem,—in his distant seat
He wrote the numbered loves we dearest know ;
Our pleasures' softest, most voluptuous flow
Was a warm cadence, murmuring to his feet.
We are his poem,—in the changing verse
I hear all human misery pant and thrill,
Harsh dissonant rhythms that break, and wail, and roar :
We are his poem,—bitter with a curse
Comes the dread closing sentence, sad and chill,
And the last words seem dark for evermore.

MY ONLY CHILD

LOVE AND DEATH

I

Love steals with footstep soft,
Nor first in guise of any joy or woe ;
His times are fickle, whether night or day ;
But ere the heart can know,
He hath come on in chances, keen and oft,
And holds two lives for ever in his sway.
So it befell with me and my sweet fay ;
When first I felt the dint, I cannot tell.
In devious ways, by swift degrees, I found
That I was conquered,—bound.
Surely, my little child, but we loved well ;
Spirit or child so white,
We were two comrades under the same spell :
Face unto face we saw in cloudless light ;
Hand clasped in hand we climbed love's golden
height.

II

Father,—that name she knew,
But lightly changed it in her pretty wont
(For every name she loved she changed alway,
Dipped in a softer fount).
And she had learned I was her lover, too.
For once, as time went on, there came the day
For her initiation. 'Dear one, say
What is the best thing in the world'; and she
Faltered not, waited not, at once confessed
'Love': only love was best.
O joy of mated hearts! Such thoughts must be
Divine intelligence
(Haply we pass heaven's sentries ere they see);
The soul stays with them in a sweet suspense,
Rests, in a supreme moment, reft from sense.

III

My mind is quick, and sees
The far-off cottage where we summered, when,
Reading those dialogues that we had brought,
She laughed and laughed again.
O sly, incorrigible Socrates !
That night was merry, and we cared for naught.
Yet then and ever in her voice I caught
An aftertone of plaint, as when there lies
A hush within the wind,—now far, now near,—
That others cannot hear.
Was it for presage ? Ere an angel dies,
Do whispers cross the wold
From kindred angels who, in secret guise,
Lest we should love too much or be too bold,
Give us dark hints of doubt and touch of cold ?

IV

Morn came with garments bright.
She, like some bird that peepeth from the nest,
Ruffles its plumes and warbles a glad song,
Carolled the while she dressed.
That little music was my heart's delight.
Sweet, too, the morning kisses: ah, how long
Lasts the remembered joy, love is so strong!
O sweetness passing strength! I hear the sound
Of winsome words come back, the dear pet names,
The artless arts, the games,—
Love will not let them go, nor be unbound.
Never a day comes on,
Nor any year, as the sad years go round
But I recall the lost lights, and anon
Feel the world dark now that my child is gone.

v

At time of morning meal,
She was beside me, and I gave her food.
This satisfied her not; her little hand,
Held out in loving mood,
Lay open, as it were in mute appeal
For food of love,—that I might understand
The heart hath its own hunger and demand.
Never again will that dear touch delay
Clasped in my clasp; and nevermore those eyes
With love's alertness rise
Each morn to mine in their frank, childish way.
Clutched in a grip of dread
She sits at a strange board, and sits for aye.
With wistful eyes, and yearning to be fed,
I stretch my hands, but stretch them to the dead.

Go, my sad song, where sorrow haunts the gate,
Not to the mighty, but the meek and mild;
Wailing and song, about a little child.

IN MEMORY OF

THE MYSTIC FACE

Can it be true that, when the body dies,
The wearied soul takes rest where rest is sure,
And after some due time returns more pure
To human wont, but with diviner eyes?
Wherein no light of memory can arise
Of love, that once we deemed might aye endure;
What time experience works the sum of cure,
New pain, new love, make a new heart more wise?
If this be so, my child, my sweet-my-sweet,
Hath haply left the secret doors of late,
And, wafted on light wings, lit here alone;
Whence I perchance the little maid may meet
Lingering all heedless at my very gate,
And pass her by unknown, unknown, unknown.

IF LOVE WERE LOVE

Some have averred that death but opes the door
As of some tenement where a soul dwelt here
That leaves this sad earth for a happy sphere,
Home of the blest; so runs the ancient lore.
But she had grieved not; joy was hers of yore
What time we went in peace and love so dear.
It must be, then, that peace can disappear;
It must be, love can perish evermore.
Dead, of a truth. Have I not gone to call
Aloud in every place your names, my pet,—
Places, now sacred, of your former stay?
Too well I know she answers not at all;
No glimpse of her sweet face has reached me yet;
If love were love, love would find out a way.

IN MEMORY OF

MUSIC

I see those fingers deftly poised or pressed,
That stirred the flash and thunder of the keys,
Or played some gracious harmony with ease,
That glided into lullabies of rest.
I see those eyes, alert in instant quest,
That learned the printed page by swift degrees:
Ah, then I drank of music to the lees!
I met the mighty masters as a guest!
Now, woe lies on me. Nevermore those eyes
Will glance with gladness; nevermore those hands
Will wake the blessèd sounds I loved to hear.
I know them as a pilgrim knows, who dies
On some late even in strange and starless lands,
A requiem wafted o'er a lonely mere.

MY ONLY CHILD

DEATH AND LOVE

I WELL recall, as joyously she sped,
  Her feet all careless of the ills to come,
  How the grim Spectre rose, pallid and numb,
  And smote her little friend to silence, dead.
I asked her of it; not a word she said;
  The rare and awful terror struck her dumb;—
  A wound, a shamed and cheated love, the sum
  Of utter evil. No: she turned her head.
And now, alas, myself am smitten mute
  With the same awful horror, from a night
  Where no star is, unfathomable, cold.
Say not that death is sent at love's own suit.
  If so, my child, who knew love's heart and
    might,
  Had heard at least the dreadful secret told.

IN MEMORY OF

AT POOLEWE

I

The clear short Ewe from its long loch Maree
Moves, singing its sad note, by swift slight curves
To one deep pool beneath a cliff, where swerves
The foam, arch-crowned,—dies fighting with the sea.
Beyond that cliff, the green of field and tree
Binds low the bay (the bay as shelter serves).
Here strides a peasant with her load of turves;
Two crofters, talking Gaelic, crowd the quay.
But, as I wend to whence the river flows,
Lo, the two giant sentries of the pass,—
Dark Airidh-ciar, Craig Mhor, broad, grimly-lined.
Sweet dale, now clad with heather for a rose,
Fain would I stay within thee; fain. Alas,
Where'er I go, the Shadow walks behind.

MY ONLY CHILD

II

As the south road turns west, there is a spot
Where the huge Craig mounts guard with awful mien;
Below, the long loch, summer-isled,—a scene
Of pictured rest. I cried, but found her not.
Nor came she forth by coign of Kérnsary, hot
With sun-shafts; nor from cliff and dene
Where Ewe went foaming, or, in pools of sheen,
Drifted with swing of song to yonder yacht.
I wended whither for a time we stayed;
On either side, her leaf (the ivy) grew.
Was it a wind that bent the branches lower?
At night I partly saw my little maid;
She smiled and touched me with sweet thought. I knew
She had passed with me through the open door.

IN MEMORY OF

IN HEAVEN

Sweet land of pure delight, of holy air,
Such as I heard of when my time was young,
Holding for truth all songs the poets sung,—
The poets, when they would be reft from care.
Now I in thought return, and wonder where
That land, and crystal sea, and glory hung
Among the constellations; if their tongue
Spoke very sooth; and if my child is there.
Although who dwells therein must needs forget,
And olden grief or love comes back no more
Beyond the bourne we traverse when we die;
Surely, if she and some lone father met,
A glance, a touch, would thrill them to the core,
Ah, burning hearts! and they would wonder why.

THE BIRD AND THE CHILD

The snow lay deep, the sky was grey and chill:
A little bird begged alms of a sweet child.
She raised the window softly, softly smiled,
And fed him with fresh crumbs upon the sill.

In a cold grave a little maiden lies.
Doth Love bring alms, doth ever Love weep there?
A little bird falls fluttering through the air,
Carols one last sad song, and singing dies.

IN MEMORY OF

A NEW YEAR'S NIGHT

I

Night comes with his brown wings
And soothes the weary world to wonted sleep,
Soft adumbration of a sleep more blest;
But unto me no deep
Of holy peace, nor muted sense, he brings.
Rather, the pensive fire-clouds of his west
Rouse me like lamps of dawn, not win to rest.
I lie awake upon my bed and muse
Of those old days, young always in my heart
And first in her sweet chart,
When Love began to give me golden news
(Joys all unknown before)
Of one small ship upon a maiden cruise:
And then I see the voyage, but no shore,
And hear the bell toll Death, Death evermore.

II

All through the gloomy hours,
A miser counts his well-remembered coins
By one dim lantern in a secret place;
Alert, with girded loins,
He gloats, he grasps, he trembles, and he cowers.
So, in my night, I stroke her fair pure face,
Calling to mind each act of tender grace,
Each for itself in its own order set.
Along the hidden, sad, incessant track,
The winsome words come back,
The smiling lips, the flashing eyes are met;
Then darkness at the last.
Gather them up, sure Memory, in thy net;
Recede not hence, O glories of my past;
Help me, O Love, help me to clutch them fast.

III

A sacred time recurs.
Upon her grave lay down some verdant wreath
Such as may seem to please my faithful child
Who slumbers in her lowly cot beneath :
Ivy, for it was hers,
Her own delight, the ivy green and wild,
Better than flowers that fade when they have
smiled.
Do this, but think not to assuage my wrong.
Within my heart another grave I know,
Deeper and colder woe,
In shorter days and nights that linger long,
Nor any period o'er my doom hath crossed :
But death and grief live ever keen and strong,
And prick me with the spears of all their frost,
And the lone wind wails out what I have
lost.

IV

One moment, without fear,
I touched the door through which she went away,
And almost drew the yielding bolt aside.
What held me in delay?
Not the wan world, the answerless, the sere.
Fain would I seek her now. Grim door, stand wide;
Give me my passage, now that she hath died.
O terror of the night! Horrible dream!
O awful thoughts, false image of the true!
Come, sweet, and say anew,
'Father, I love you so'; and bring your team
Of kisses harnessed with glad words, and laughing eyes,
And little songs; and kindle morning's beam.
Put your arms round my neck in olden wise,
And tell me I am late, and bid me rise.

Song, lay thee on the wind;
Seek sorrow's vigil in a lonesome bed:
Chant of the morn, of love no longer dead.

IN MEMORY OF

LONGING

I would not that the breath of my desire
Should ruffle thy white plumes with one poor plea;
Nor would I bid thee live again with me,
And trail thy glorious robes in earthly mire.
I am too cold; thou art a soul on fire:
Toiling, I learn; all wisdom thou dost see:
I faint; there is no weariness in thee:
I am so low; and thou divinely higher.
Yet thou art my own child, and I do yearn
For a fresh sight of that sweet, gentle face,
As in the dear old time ere grief befell.
Wilt thou not come? not just for once return
And greet thy father by the silent place,
The silent place of waiting and farewell?

MY ONLY CHILD

IVY

I

'Mid moonbeams cold, through dim autumnal haze
See yonder lonely tower within the dene;
Foursquare, it shivers in the shivering sheen,
Its lords forgotten, and its glorious days.
By chink and cranny and all clefted ways,
The faithful ivy clothes its walls with green:
The mourning stems toil high; their gentle screen
Tempers time's touch with exquisite delays.
On me a colder, dimmer radiance falls,
Who once flashed fire beneath the morning sun,—
The mighty sun, that laughs with all he brings.
Deep in my heart a nameless sorrow crawls;
By peace and storm I am alike undone;
But she climbs up, and clasps, and closer clings.

II

Sweet are all flowers in summer's golden day ;
The sleepy wind dreams in their drifted scent ;
Grace toys amid their petals, half intent ;
On every leaf the pearls of morning play.
Sad are all flowers in storm or winter's way ;
Woe gnaws their cups, nor ever will relent ;
Now is the breath of their deep odours spent ;
No pretty dews will weep for their decay.
Poor fleeting flowers ! She bade ye all go by,
And sought for wear a few choice ivy leaves,—
Green ivy gathered from a wayside wall.
I saw her wont, but would not ask her why.
Love hath two songs, one glad and one that grieves :
She knew that faith in love is all in all.

MY ONLY CHILD

IN BLAME OF SPRING

O FLOWERS, O fickle flowers,
Why bloom ye as of yore,
Now that the dainty bud of spring's fresh hours
Unfolds no more?
I thought that for all youth
Ye would have had more ruth.

O leaves, O verdant leaves,
Why ope at this sad time?
It is enough that one poor singer grieves;
Must ye then climb?
I thought ye could have known,
And not so careless grown.

IN MEMORY OF

O birds, O birds so strong,
Why chant ye high in noon?
Have ye forgot my nestling and her wrong
So soon, so soon?
I thought your little throats
Would warble wailing notes.

O wind, O vernal breath,
Why come so swift and sweet?
Our gentle playmate is the thrall of Death;
Mourn with thy feet.
I thought of bitter cold
Atremble in thy hold.

O light, O dawn of light,
That dost the world endow,
Better by far be changed to sombre night;
Shame on thee now!

MY ONLY CHILD

I thought there was no day,
When my love went away.

Spirit of earth and air,
Of seas that ebb and flow,
Bring all that lives, that ever was most fair,
Silent and slow.
Come, I will bid ye weep,
Whereto my love doth sleep.

IN MEMORY OF

TOUCH ME

Where art thou gone, my sweet?
I call thee, sad and slow.
Why is the time made long for us to meet?
Yearning I go.
Touch me, and I shall know.

I ask the leaves, the flowers,
Whence their new grace and glee;
Who tendeth them against the wind, the showers,
Guideth the bee:
Touch me, and I shall see.

Where is that little voice
That told me love was dear?
Where are the songs that made the morn rejoice?
Distant or near?
Touch me, and I shall hear.

MY ONLY CHILD

Forth in the deepening night
All things move prone, to kneel
As at an angel's access from the light ;
Is heaven so real ?
Touch me, and I shall feel.

I search the fickle years,
Fain in them to discern
A living dew for eyes that have no tears,
Till thou return :
Touch me, and I shall learn.

On fret with old desire,
I wander all unblest,
From thought to thought for ever climbing higher,
Seeking thy nest :
Touch me, and I shall rest.

IN MEMORY OF

Touch me, and I shall know
That sea, and land, and air,
Bring ever my lost love to me; and so,
Live like a prayer:
Certain thou wilt be there.

SISTE !

O WIND, take heed ;
When thy strong pinions waft thee near her nest,
Forget thy birth, delay that eager speed,
Alight, and droop to rest.

Thou snow, recall
How dainty is the folded bud beneath.
Let thy flakes softly on the hillside fall,
Thy maidens make a wreath.

O vernal dew,
So fresh, so gentle on a day's fierce heat,
Thou wilt find bitter tears distilled anew ;
Blend them with thine more sweet.

IN MEMORY OF

Dark, tender night,
Come slowly to that solemn trysting-place;
Set round thy sentry-stars, till morning light
Strive first to touch her face.

Dear elves so quaint,
Who wont to watch for her full sigh from sleep,
Gather ye, too, at eve around my Saint,
Your little friend, and weep.

All holy things
That wait in peace upon the pure and mild,
Guard ye in loving turn, with poisèd wings,
The grave of my one child.

And thou, my heart,
Wherein the icons of her memories lie,
Keep them within thy secret depths apart,
For worship, till I die.

MY ONLY CHILD

My only child. Alas, the marching year
Grows wayworn and forgets, and all is sere:
But round my memory, circling still, I know
The stealthy plaint, that gathered from below
First on that afternoon when Death came here.

Ay, ever since, now distant and now near,
'Mid noise of men or 'neath the silent sphere,
A whisper moves, brim-laden with all woe,—
My only child.

Heart of the world, and hast thou not one tear,
One tear for me, whose fount is dry and drear?
Deep calleth unto deep, and answereth, No.
And still the sad refrain swings, sure and slow,
And last I plead to heaven, if that may hear,—
My only child.

THE PASSAGE

I too shall, after that dark night,
  Wake in a world new won,
And feel the illimitable light
  Glow from a sky all sun.

At first, my still half-mortal gaze
  Will swerve, and shift, and shrink,
And gather strength by soft delays,
  And scan the azure brink.

The brink will shimmer wide and fair
  In turn of underdraught;
The oars, the sail be handy there,
  Stowed in a little craft.

MY ONLY CHILD

Who will step in to take the helm
  Upon that unknown sea,
And guide me to the restful realm,
  The longed-for joy? Will she?

Or shall I know, behind my sail,
  A spirit's stresses stir,
And need no compass and no gale,
  But seek, alone, for her?

Haply some bird will round me play,
  On waft of pinions white,
Throughout the long, the dreamy day;
  Then quickly droop from flight,

And settle in my lap, and start,
  And with a clear, low call,
Rouse the deep wonder of my heart,—
  O Love, I see it all!

I shall float surely to that west
Where thy lost glories be;
And with her find her own sweet nest:
All will be well with me.

MORNING HYMN

Awake, my soul, and with the morn
Be all thy love-thoughts newly born;
As when they first, in tender guise,
Redeemed the world and made thee wise.

Within my heart's most secret cell,
Where now her holy icons dwell,
Before thou farest on thy way,
Enter awhile, and yearn, and pray.

Low at those shrines forget thy fear,
And let no bitterness draw near;
Nor any wing of sorrow brood
Round thee, in that blest solitude.

Then shape the sweet resolve that stands
Awaiting thee from those dear hands;
Recall her mien, the open glance
That touched and lit each happy chance.

But chiefly take Love's cup and drink
Deeper than all thy thirst, and think
What makes the strength more keenly strong,
What points the craft and stirs the song.

Then, while the rose-clouds veil the stars,
Close up the doors, and bolt the bars,
And issue to the world; but so,
None of thy inward quest may know.

Thus wake, my soul, with every morn,
And all thy love-thoughts newly born;
For these alone, in tender guise,
Redeem the world, and make thee wise.

EVENING HYMN

My soul, before the wont of sleep,
Thou must awhile thy vigil keep,
And find again the secret way
That held thee in the dawn of day.

Sweet contemplation bringeth rest;
Love, of all medicines, is best;
There are no comforters like those,
The heart's own kindred of repose.

Bethink thee of her tender grace
Of act and word, and frank embrace;
But not in sorrow, not in pain,
Trace the child-history again.

IN MEMORY OF

As rise each year her ivy leaves
More close and tall round ruined eaves ;
All memories will clearer show,
And firmer clasp, and stronger grow.

And as each year the old bird-guests
In clinging ivy build their nests ;
From thoughts of her shall glories spring,
And with a summer song take wing.

Touched by that purer sense, perchance
Thou wilt receive her long-sought glance ;
Or, in the stillness, hear the sounds
Of peaceful songs on loving rounds.

Then ever, soul, before thou sleep,
Awhile this inward vigil keep ;
And blessings from the secret way
Will hold thee till the dawn of day.

DEATH IN LIFE

Fair sun of heaven, how keen thy glances glow!
Sweet birds afrolic, how ye flash in flight
And warble to the winds! Noon holds the height,
And the glad heart of summer beats below.
Ah, pulse of life that brimmeth, danceth so!
Ah, joy of being! Ah, crested waves' delight!
Ah, proffered bliss! Ah, once communing might!
Now ye are out of touch, and cannot know.
Not know. For sorrow came, and left my face
Gay as thou art, O Nature, in this mood,
And all my use the same, and nothing said.
Alas, it is deceit for my lost grace:
I move as I am stirred; a solitude,
A spirit's lees; (a secret), eight years dead.

VIGIL

Did I not go, my sweet,
At night-tide in those far-off days,
Answering thy signal; and, with loved delays
Beside thee, talk of fairy feet,
And barter kisses ere thy rest,—as meet
In childhood's holy ways?

We paid Love service then,
Laid spices on his golden hours;
Our hearts took alway from him double dowers.
The glad stars quired for us, as when
They chanted in the prime, and quired again;
Such joy, such peace were ours.

MY ONLY CHILD

Now it is mine to call
On thee, from a sad, wakeful bed ;
To call upon thy spirit who art dead.
Dear, if not held in any thrall,
Nest close with those frank eyes ; and so let all
Our loves again be said.

And haste thee to the count
Of what thy days be, in a land
Of bliss made perfect by a master-hand ;
Where time from a crystálline fount
Flows ever, and thy thoughts are near the mount
Of Love, and understand.

A little house is thine,
Maybe, such as we talked of here,
O'ergrown with ivy, and a streamlet near ;

A wild hedge, tipped with tall woodbine ;
And, in the chambers, all is thy design,
Simple, and neat, and clear.

And One knocks at the door,
Who, entering softly, climbs the stairs,
And sitting by thee, as thy hand he shares,
Minds thee of words well known before ;
And thy heart burns within thee more and more;—
'Tis father, unawares.

For oft, after sunfall,
My spirit has so sought thee in my rimes,
That I have caught the wind of those strange chimes,—
Heard steps beyond the boundary wall,
Thy vesper cadence and familiar call ;
We must have met sometimes.

Therefore be by me now
Ere day come darkening my night,
And the mask seals me from all others' sight;
And tell me of heaven's school time, how
Thou learnest; where thy playmates sport;—and thou,
Being winsome, hast delight.

And dost thou summer there
Alway; or, passing through some rift
Of glowing cloud, slant fain to me, and sift
The innumerous sun-shafts, so that fair
Only have transit, and the very air
Takes from thee a sweet gift?

This, when I seek those ways
That lead to haunted hearths of old,
Now sacred, and alight with evening gold

Of sorrow ; where I sigh thy praise
In secret to the wind on weary days,
By stream, and vale, and wold.

Ah ! not far off, a cot
(In that sick children's home of thine),
Named after thee, receiveth like a shrine
Thy mercies to a hapless lot ;
And thy young tenderness, all unforgot,
Grows effluent and divine.

A little walk from thence,
Another shrine within the hill lies deep,
Where thou and I one day took death and sleep,
And thou wast changed to quest of sense ;
When my world-shadows gathered grim and dense,
And the home path grew steep.

MY ONLY CHILD

Hast seen the ivy-mat,
The green leaves o'er thy casket spread,
The circled flowers, the marble at the head,
The flower-cross scriptured more than that;
And, as may be, the lone ones who thereat
With wistful eyes stand dead?

Thy three friends come up hill
Where we live yet; they're grown; and one
A wedded life (Ah, blest!) hath new begun:
But they are children to me still.
Do they remember? Love must hold his will,
Though years on years may run.

For me, at morn and night,
Thou knowest all my kindling aims
Ask benediction of thee; their pure flames
Take thence their breath, their vestal light:

And I count one by one all thy pet names,
As some poor beadsman might.

Our love by Love was led,
And often we began anew,
And called it best, nor asked if it were true:
And I would stroke your little head,
And tell you how I loved you; and you said,
'And so do I love you.'

So,—ere the chance hath ceased.
For now the curtains glimmer grey,
And thy robe fadeth. O my sweet, stay, stay,
Give me a parting kiss at least,—
One more,—one more. Ah, ruthless, ruthless east!
My east, my night, my day.

HER PORTRAIT

THYSELF. Half joy, half plaint ere that release
That near thy lips in mobile mystery lies
Among the shadows. Hast thou some surmise
That love is here, and did not know decease?
As in cool wells that not a wind may crease,
I gaze into the clearness of those eyes;
There my own soul dissolving lives and dies,
And dies and lives, and hath more perfect peace.
A waft comes on me of the filial breath;
Thy rosebuds touch me; through the tear-drawn haze
Return thy winsome hours in sweet review.
Surely long since did thou and I share death;
But thy dear presence stays, for ever stays,
Myself it is that finds the greeting new.

IN MEMORY OF

A LOCK OF HER HAIR

A LITTLE wrapper, dated, kept with care,
Wherein a thousand loves their secrets hide;
Wherein her memory dwelleth who hath died;
Grief set in gold; Love's aureole is there.
From this pure eve-lit tress, my soul in prayer
Soars to that saint for ever glorified.
Yearn to me, O sweet brows; sweet hands, be wide;
Wind, waft a blessing from that holy air.
Did I mistake? Methought, for stolen quest,
Some youthful zephyr in the hush drew on,
With slide of wings before the purple glow;
And her fair face descended, stooping low,
And touched me,—as, upon the waters' breast,
A summer bird skims lightly, and is gone.

REMEMBRANCE

I

Within the hidden mirror of my brain,
I see the world's recess ; and all that is
Hath hollow echoes, twilight mysteries,
Dim phantoms stealing to dark dawns again.
Herein dost deem lone love's remembrance vain ?
And am I wrong to sorrow for past bliss,
The little joys, the guerdons that I miss,
The bridge that led delight to broader pain ?
Last eve there was a sunset. Down the west
Sank the grand orb in flare of rainbow-tints,
And the long shafts fell level and more low,
Till lapsed from vision. But the water's breast
Had caught the glory of his golden dints,
And held till late the lovely afterglow.

IN MEMORY OF

DREAM LIFE

When thou didst die, then sorrow was bestrewn:
Love nested close; the wan world waned
between;
Day comes not now with lances of bright sheen,
Nor night, with spangled stars and silver moon.
O'er land and sea a twilight sense stole soon,
A drift of benediction, felt and seen;
So that all sight hath now a distant mien,
All sounds have rest in chords of tenderer tune.
Yet thy dear face, thy words, thy ways remain
In memory's haunted island off the shore,
So fair, so fresh, as these sad years go by,
That, haply sleeping, I could wake again,
And unsurprised behold thee here once more,
And know it for a dream that thou didst die.

MY ONLY CHILD

HER COMING

I MUSE within my garden on the hill,
What time the summer and the silence wait;
And none seek entry at the closèd gate,
And all wings rest, and every wind is still.
What stirreth, then, this garth of inward will,
Where memory sits with folded arms of late?
What is this breath that seems regenerate,
This first soft sound that echoes lift and fill?
It must be thou that hoverest o'er my soul,
Whispering our sacred language, in response
To my long need (the need I told thee of);
The deep calm suits thee, and the dreaming dole
Of eyes care-curtained in these listless haunts,
O immemorial lovelet, O my love!

IN MEMORY OF

CHANGED RESOLVE

I WILL go forth and fare within the wood:
'Tis afternoon; and in the summer glade,
Where the small hillock meets the beechen shade,
I may chance on her secret solitude.
The squirrel sports there, and the dove's young brood,
And the leaves lightly laugh in their arcade;
And, crowned with festal flowers, my little maid
May keep high court and bring beatitude.
Nay, I will not go forth. The shadows lie
Deeper within my heart; sequestered so,
Blend the young voices, but in happier bowers:
There hold we our new converse; or come nigh,
A face, a flash in darkness,—let me know
At least one glimpse of bliss, in these sad hours.

MY ONLY CHILD

GRASS OF PARNASSUS

I CLOMB the hill and, in a nook of dew
(What time an early autumn touched the bay),
Found thee, a dweller dainty-sweet midway,
Where, on a sunny morn, the west wind blew.
Grass of Parnassus! Surely then I knew
Flowers are the site of tender Love's delay;
Hence by thy pure white petals did I stay,
And read thy crystal lines at closer view.
O, but thou wert so white! I could aver
That my lost child went thither soft and soon,
Alighting on the slope with holy feet;
So that there rose a little bud like her,
Left as a welcome to my quest at noon,—
That she and I, that love and Love, might meet.

IN MEMORY OF

FOR DEATH

I

Come when thou wilt, O Death, with grey calm face,
As when, long since, thy sacred seal was set
In that front chamber, and Love's eyes were wet,
But, ah! not mine, for dead was all my grace.
I have long since prepared thy perfect place,
And lined it with black sorrow for a debt;
Enter at thine own hour and be well met;
Enter, and we will weep in mute embrace.
Against that night, I ask this evermore:—
Bring her bright glance with thee, and let her hand
Light on my head, her lip where my lip dies:
And may she say 'dear father' as before,
Heart to my heart; while over sea and land,
The stars look down with sad, eternal eyes.

II

As two who long have loved, but may not speak,
In casual ways encountered, yearn and sigh,
Snatching a furtive touch as they go by,
And so fare on in lonely paths and bleak;
Till o'er them, thus enduring and most meek,
Compassionate Fate stoops down, and draws them nigh
Some secret place of joy, to deify
That hour for them, with rapturous cheek to cheek:—
So Death, dear friend, come thus, whom I have met
In weary tracks, perchance, of mute desire.
When will thine arms of love around me cling
At last, and stir the godhead of new spring,
And bear me instant to her heaven, and set
My soul at her sweet radiance, cloud in fire?

IN MEMORY OF

VAIN QUEST

Where shall I find my pet?
Nesting in ivy with the little birds,
Scarce fledged with her new wings as yet?
If I fared tenderly, should I be met
With tiny songs for words?
Ah! no.

Maybe, among the flowers,
Some flowret's petals rise more dainty fair,
Lay richer scent on golden hours.
If I should seek her bright eyes in the bowers,
Should I discern them there?
Ah! no.

MY ONLY CHILD

White are the lambs at play,
What time Spring sets new garlands on the earth
And rapture revels in the day.
If thitherward I went on pensive way,
Would she be in the girth?
Ah! no.

Winter comes grey and grim,
And hangs his tresses upon all the trees;
The winds are hushed for fear of him.
If I should cry to morning faint and dim,
Would she light up the leas?
Ah! no.

Or should I call her back
For one long kiss in clinging arms again;
Though Hope kept shifting on the tack,
And whispered surely of her coming back,
Would she indeed be fain?
Ah! no.

IN MEMORY OF

Where should her sweetness dwell?
Not all the voices of the changing year,
Not all our heaven or earth, can tell
What region holds her since that last farewell.
She lives with Love,—not here,—
Ah! no.

MY ONLY CHILD

BIRTH UNION

I

Whence, issuing through birth's immemorial door,
First opened for a due of one deep sigh,
Didst thou that evening to my soul draw nigh,
O babe, O bliss, bound with me evermore?
Did echoes guide thee from that elder shore
In this world's venture, as we thought? Did I
Build up old stones of love, to glorify
Our garnered years,—or grace unknown before?
Alas, true heart, so much I dimly guess,
And fret for answer that no answer brings,
And fare not far to thee with yearning done:

IN MEMORY OF

Only I know the world grows less and less,
And my sense waits, and strangeness fills all things,
And that new birth to thy sweet age draws on.

II

Dear soul, receive me for thy very own,
When that dream-transit ceases, at the gate
Of thy white heaven, where all ways terminate,
Where instant bliss in pain of bliss makes moan.
So will the past fade; we shall meet alone
In that pure momentary poise, elate,
Brought to the fount of being by guardian fate,—
The fount of being, that flows but is unknown.
Ah! with what words, what silence, in what guise?
Will earth see this, or some fair star above?
And, as of years, shall we in years embrace?
Or wilt thou mother me with those sweet eyes,
And cooing calls and dainty drifts of love,—
Me newly-born, a babe with wistful face?

THE POOL

It lies half hidden near a lonely glade,
In the field's lap, scarce moved by any breeze;
For on the windward side are sheltering trees,
Grim stalwart soldiers,—morning's ambuscade.
Not all pellucid: 'neath deep shelves of shade,
And fern with furze, and wild rose blent with these:
The shallows hold sparse stems; a spring at ease
Flows in and out, in silence unessayed.
Lo! it is thou, my heart. Bend down thy will
Where, as in glass, thy secret self is known,—
Dark, sad, sequestered, yearning to the sky;
But that small fount of love supplies thee still,
And yet superfluous passes out and on,
Till death and some new orbit leave thee dry.

HER MIRROR

In those old days, delight of all sweet days,
This mirror took her glance at early morn;
Catching her casual words, her smiles new-born,
And, like a lover, stored her pretty ways.
Then lips, and cheeks, and eyes, and gentle traits,
Became a memory wandering and worn;
So, buried in my heart's deep crypt forlorn,
They rested,—rest till the heart's self decays.
I know the mirror since that while is dim;
And all day long its silver peers and peers
On slant of light to mystic corners bent:
The blank room answers not, nor any limb
Stirs in the shadows; and no creature hears
One rustle; and the void will not relent.

IN MEMORY OF

NIGHT

Dark, tender, solemn Night!
That comest on to our awaiting west,
With foot unseen, and dewy air that sleeps
Nigh mute upon thy breast:
Now that the glitter of day's hapless light
Hath sunk below the ruddy vesper steeps,
A strangeness stirs my heart's immortal deeps,
A waking voice that fain would touch thine own;
While my lips shape themselves, and shift and feel
For thine, in pure appeal;
And here we stand ineffably alone,
At this sea's marge, whose will
Worships at thine: so that no wave makes moan,
But calmly, at the base of cliff and hill,
Stays the world's tremulous pulse, and makes it still.

MY ONLY CHILD

Yea, as in weary flight
The home-bound birds strive for their nest, nor bate
One wing-waft in their gathering joys' return,
I long for thee of late,
The near communions of thy soul, O Night.
Then my dead loves arouse themselves, and turn
Forth from their graves again; as flames that yearn
To one another, so they touch and blend,
And part, and blend; and each one greets,
In the heart's lonely streets,
The loved, the lost, the immemorial friend.
And this delight they know
On whom thy secret gifts and Love's descend.
The grim day's wheels, immeasurably slow,
Grind life to dust beneath the mills of woe.

IN MEMORY OF

Once I felt fear of thee,
As of some agèd kinsman's awful eyes,
To whom youth drags a slow, reluctant pace
In timorous surmise;
And then I peopled the uncertainty
With dismal sounds, cold touch of ghastly face,
And spectral impact of some dread embrace.
But now, O friend, myself would have thee nigh,
Waiting thy dawn with eager lips to kiss
Thine own more perfect bliss.
For when the twilight heralds onward hie,
My glory hails from far,
By land, and sea, and welcome of the sky;
And my keen vision rises, star to star,
And the gates open where the eternal are.

Then flows from glorious spheres
That nocturn infinite, melodious,
That draws the hidden life to points of power,
And wakes the god in us.
Hence, as each change grows crescent, halts, or veers,
And the glad singers' ranks descend or tower,
The soul responds in that exultant hour.
Then come the friendly angels, whom I knew
In some old life, perhaps, or this, or yet
Shall win for gift or debt;
And my long-parted joys, the lost, the few,
Throb through the portal's height,
Pearl-spangled with their glittering orbs of dew:
And last, from inner heaven of fresh delight,
A soft hush comes, and thy chief bliss, O night!

IN MEMORY OF

A lily in her hand,
And on her head a golden star she bears,
And at her neck one leaf of ivy-green:
She glides forth clad with prayers.
Heaven's arch of silence spans the raptured land;
And swift she flies, as doth a soul unseen,
Wide-eyed, and aureoled with Love's sacred sheen;
Till nearer, clearer, on her father's breast
She droops, and clings,—her cheek upon my cheek
With joy too full to speak,
As once of old, a bird within her nest:
And there, O child so sweet,
She lies in utter calm and makes me blest:
So that all sense departs of cold or heat,
Or Time himself, still-stayed on reverent feet.

MY ONLY CHILD

A little nerve did shake
In one of us, as a string touched by sound
Born in a far-off place, but drifted here,—
A soul on some stray round.
O lissom limbs, soft-trembling ere ye wake,
I know the dawn, the rose of dawn is near;
I feel the dark grow forth from grey to clear.
Our oneness takes a difference, and the time
Seems short, and ah! I see thee lessen, fade,
Ere I have kissed and prayed.
O stay! heaven yet reserves the prime,
While one more hour thou hast
Ere comes the harsh-struck clang, the matin
chime.—
Ah me! I saw the aerial gates flash fast
And close as she went by, a lingerer, last.
O song, be echoed in my cheerless day.
Speed forth, O sun, and welcome to thy might,
So thou bring on again beloved Night.

IN MEMORY OF

MY BIRTHDAY

What doth he bring to me,—
Time, that hath never hour, nor day,
Nor year carved on his unimpassioned eyes;
But sets these marks on us, whose enterprise
Toils through his stations, on the way
To long eternity?

Surely the seasons past
Have not been tinctured with delight
Too much; nor wisdom come too soon, too fain
Nor hopes been o'erfulfilled, however sane.
I have won on in fate's despite,
Received my first due last.

MY ONLY CHILD

What of my early stress
In youth bereft of Love's reward,—
That sun of being whose glory gilds the morn?
What of that new-wrought sweetness, later-born,
Death took from me, stern underlord,—
Took, and gave no redress?

Ah, should I match with these
The single dints, the casual grace,
The raptured insight imminent to part?
Or even the longer, silent rest of heart,
An efflux from one childish face
Moulded in mysteries?

Nay, O incessant Time,
My thought will not upon thee wait,
But let the grim addition be thine own;
I wot for whom the balance will be shown.

IN MEMORY OF

Now, ere the dark and it be late,
I speak my soul in rime.

Say if the silver hair
Will come to a less reverend head
Bent for the cheap compassion of my kind?
What of the ears grown deaf, the sight grown blind,
The limbs reluctant and half dead
Upon the dreary chair?

The feeble voice, the lost control,
The poor pretence of sage and firm,
The thought half gasped and quenched in some excuse
Mere-muttered from the lips that hang so loose,—
Lips ready for the hungry germ,
On sentry at the goal?

Ah, will this be my lot?
Then tell me if the inner sense
Will post at equal pace, and if a vain
Dim quest will follow, through the heart and brain,
For love's lost trace of evidence
And lapse of strenuous thought?

As yet, I hold steadfast
In memory's crypt, in secret hour,
Her face and all the aspect of my bliss;
No, not till now hath one point gone amiss,
Due ranged, of all her love's sweet power
In that high-visioned past.

Take, if thou must, the throne
Where the mind sits in sovran seat,
Admits the embassage of godlike kings,

And sees the law, the order of all things;
But leave that treasure still complete,
Love still my very own.

Or, if that be too much,
Forget some nerve or ganglion,
While the rest answer not from their decay;
Let it be sacred to her old, dear way,
Her thoughts there entering one by one,
Her look, her voice, her touch.

The nurse may see me smile,
And haply wonder what event
Hath chanced to bring this strange beatitude;
But I shall hug my joy, and sit and brood,
Silent, upon the visit She hath spent,—
Happy for one brief while.

MY ONLY CHILD

I shall be young again
Within my unquenched life, and feel
The winter like a spring, and new desire;
As one who sees, beside a cheerful fire,
His household merry at their meal,
The storm without the pane.

Desire, that once before
Left me in lonely loss, unblest,
Will mould a finer fruit to perfect grace.
One night, I know I shall behold her face
And clasp her hand in mine,—for rest,
Fair paths, sweet love once more.

IN MEMORY OF

HER HEAVENLY REST

Forth from its inner deeps
My soul, on disembodied quest,
Fain would ascend at this sweet hour of rest
Whither in heaven she sleeps.

For though no dark comes there,
Nor silver moon, nor tremulous star,
Nor rose of sun that sinketh faint and far,
Nor hush within the air;

Yet surely times are set,
To mate our own beloved repose;
When the celestial petals cling and close,
The cherubim forget.

MY ONLY CHILD

From the lone central calm,
I see some gentle harpers glide
Down a long zephyr, where the children bide,
And chant the signal psalm.

There, in cool verdant vales,
Where brooks in bubbles drift and dream,
Murmuring all slumberous sounds that soothe,
and seem
Answered to nightingales,

In peace the lovelets lie.
Soft umbrage broods upon the sward
'Neath arch of benediction; and the guard
Hovers and wafts him by.

Thither, on Love's own wings,
I will fare past all starry ways,
Where light with light a-twinkle laughs and plays,
And every planet sings.

Great suns will shout 'All well';
But far beyond them, by that sea
Of glass, and shore that shapes eternity,
I meet the sentinel.

The password is 'My Love,'
A smile the only coin for toll;
And, on the instant, my exulting soul
Finds her within the grove.

As here once wont she lies,
In ebb and flow of blissful breath;
Upon her lips that smile she wore in death;
Pink leaves upon her eyes.

A soft bloom tints her cheek,
That I know not, such as on fruit
That haply ripens from some heavenly root,
If I had time to seek.

And as I watch my fair
Still child, so human, so divine,
Awe mingles with me; at the holy shrine
My soul becomes a prayer.

Unutterable thought,
Yearning as once on earth I felt,
And swifter senses, musing till they melt,
With these to one are wrought.

So that my heart moves hers
And, one in one, one pulse we beat;
And then, my thought immantling thought more
sweet,
The little spirit stirs.

For me her lips' delight
She moves,—me visioned in a dream;
As in the fall of fairy tales, I seem
Half shaded, half in sight.

'Dear little father,' then;
And then the quiver of a kiss,
And fingers stretched for clasp of wonted bliss;
'I love you so,' again.

Cheek that I may not touch,
And velvet of the gentle voice within,
And heart that, seeking not, all hearts did win,
Have I loved overmuch?

No; else this happy shore
Would have been closed to my fond track;
I should have sought but to be beaten back;
No; let me love thee more.

So shall thine angel call
Thy father once again to tread
These ways to find the secret of thy bed,
The drift of eve forestall.

MY ONLY CHILD

Ah! if not yet I share
My life with thee, nor hand in hand,
At last thy learner, stay and understand
The glories that are there;

Surely the time will fly
More swift upon that lingering earth,
Since I have seen thy face, and felt the worth
Of what it is to die.

And more and more each hour
Until that last, when thou shalt be
My conscious welcome to eternity,
I shall have peace and power.

And now, for thee alone,
A little token I may leave;
A point of our old sport at shut of eve,
When thou wert all my own.

And thou wilt wake aright
With widening glance, and catch the trace;
And call, with laughter in thy glowing face,
'Father was here last night!'

Heart of my night and day,
I 'd dally; but the guard, unseen
Till now, hath touched me, and the golden sheen
Of harpers wends this way.

Here onward grows their song,
And in myself a matin gladness chimes;
And thou wilt hear of me and these my rimes:
I shall come back ere long.

PRAYER

Not with our birth did life begin,
Nor in the grave will make an end;
Through orbs of being we descend,
Through cycled sorrow, joy, and sin.

This world that is, and seems no more,
We shall reconquer once again;
And thrill with pleasure or with pain,
Far-crescent, that we felt before.

And though, in sooth, the gate is dim
Through which we pass at death, and take
New quest upon us when we wake,
Remembrance fainting at the rim,—

Yet flakes and fragments of surmise
Trail back from that impending past
Sometimes; so that we hold full fast
A swing of gesture, glint of eyes,

Or murmur of a dear old song
That, wafted hither o'er the bounds,
Comes by itself; and all the sounds
We know, and where they did belong.

At eve with hands loose-locked we sit
And watch the flicker of the fire;
And ghostly dreams of mute desire
Take body from that eld, and flit,

And rouse swart memories, eager plans,
Suggesting long-dissevered powers;
So that we ask, Were they then ours?
And, Could such wonder be a man's?

MY ONLY CHILD

Whole genera have died, they say,
Merged into less, but abler, forms ;
And these a ripening spirit warms,
Within a girth of nobler clay.

Some bone, left in with fate's consent,
May hint, through ages dark and wide,
An ankle or a wrist decide,
Perhaps, which way we came and went.

So is it for the articulate mind.
We trace the rest of previous growth
Hid in the new ; we sort them both,
And look before, and look behind.

And haply, as we search and fret,
A thought may open half its eyes,
And widen to a wish, and rise
Where hope bestirs, or tranced regret ;

And passionate longing lifts and draws
The inmost heart appealing higher,
Until in heaven's own heart of fire
It seeks the heart that gave it cause;

And backward borne, and far above,
In one pure poise of perfect pain,
Bowed at the portal, but in vain,
Moans for its immemorial love.

Or, may be, one within our life
Most gently links the fair and sweet.
How blest the dainty moods that beat
Response, in daughter or in wife!

And time winds on, in verdant meads
Floral with happy incidents;
We ask not Whither, Why, or Whence,
And all goes well, and no one heeds.

Till, at an instant unforeknown,
The traveller in mid-journey halt;
And feel a touch, a new default,
A whisper that he walks alone.

And peering in those duteous eyes
With sudden sense of long delay,
Sees but the dimness of the day,
And grasps and clutches, grasps and cries.

Now knowing well that scarce in part
His cycled love before him stands,
He gathers his imploring hands,
And wraps his mantle round his heart.

While still, along the verdant meads,
Bordered with happy incidents,
Time moves; but he has met the Whence,
Whither, and Why,—and no one heeds.

IN MEMORY OF

I knew a man who, in such gaze,
So pierced the immeasurable bliss,—
Such agony of joy was his,—
So bright the flash within the haze,—

That on through opened hours and weeks
He saw Fate carving its design;
And, quick to snatch one awful line,
He read the death upon her cheeks.

And when the flash had faded by,
He loved his child with changed regard;
His voice fell wistful, absent, hard,
And he, like her, began to die.

Hence, now he follows everywhere
By ways that are a sacrament:
To none such vision hath been sent,
And not charged all the life with prayer.

For prayer is when the clear-wrought soul
Finds itself strayed and separate;
Sighs for its everlasting mate,
And thenceforth struggles to be whole:

And restless, yearning, wailing, worn,
The twin-descended past perceives;
And through the night awakes, believes,
And stretches onward to the morn.

Bereft I cry, on bended knee,
O tender love, O dawn of grace,
O unforgotten childish face,
My bliss that wert, and art to be!

TO MY WHITE LOVE, IN WINTER

The days are so short, and the air is so cold,
And I shrink to the warmth of the fire;
The grief of the snowdrift lies dead on the wold,
And the night will be long and come nigher.
Hermit-heart sits within,
And I yearn to my kin.
O come and see me, my sweet love, my white love!

A golden star shines in the black of the vault,
But my blessing is not in the star;
The frosty wind pulses, anon it will halt,
But my joys in its beats never are.
Little light that I miss!
Little breath, with a kiss!
O come and see me, my sweet love, my white love!

MY ONLY CHILD

I sit alone, thinking of years of lost grace,
And I call the dear incidents back,
Each one in its order, a friend and a face,
Yet for ever a glory to lack.
Little hand that once lay
In my own every day!
O come and see me, my sweet love, my white love!

The months move and mourn, they are winter to me,
Now the verdure of love is no more.
And sorrow hath muted the lips of the sea;
But I know that I wait at the shore
For the voice of my bird,
Who will bring me my word.
O come and see me, my sweet love, my white love.

IN MEMORY OF

SPIRIT GROWTH

For long I thought of you as when I last
Saw your dear face, a child upon my knee,
Or kissed you at the nightfall peacefully,
Or held your hand when rose of morn came past.
All these, these old delights, I keep full fast
Still, my eternal love, where'er I be;
No power shall shift them from my mind and me;
Not one remains ungarnered, unamassed.
Now, O my sweet, I see no little maid
In that fair world; but pitiful deep eyes
And tremulous smiles on lips that move to moan.
The cycle comes, for ever ungainsaid,
The space of sorrows, felt without replies;
The weary hope, the waiting all alone.

THEN AND NOW

'FATHER, be quick and give me a kiss.'
(We were out on the Barnet road, for a walk;
Some frolic of love had led her to this;
She pulled my hand, and stopped in her talk.)

'Little one, little one, hush, hush, hush!
Any one passing would stare at me;
And then the father would have to blush,
And the telegraph post would report wee, WEE.'

She eyed me a moment with solemn face,
Stood firm in my way and clasped me tight;
I bent me down and kissed her a space,—
What else should I do with the blessèd mite?

Now, I am in exile far from there,
And the post has gone, for aught I know,
And the road, mayhap, now leads elsewhere;
But this is certain, and will be so:—

The breath of her lips still rests on these,
And here are the kisses of my sweet may;
The grave glance lingers, and no one sees;
But I walk alone on the world's highway.

SPIRIT TIMES

As in that old illusion, where the scene
Dissolves to verdant spring from winter's white,
And then glows forth to summer trebly bright,
And autumn, and new winter cold and lean;
And, while we gaze, the season and the sheen
Wax and wane on before the clear-wrought sight,
Which yet perceives no shift within the light,
And not a touch around the circled screen:—
So I, intent upon my one lost child,
Toward whom in that far heaven I watch and wait,
See her sweet visage fluent with the hour.
Sometimes the little lips have kissed and smiled,
Sometimes she mourns and hath a woman's gait.
Behind, in darkness, broods the sovran Power.

IN MEMORY OF

LA FESTA DEL MORTE

Sweet, the snow falls to-day.
It is nine years since you died.
The snow hath fallen upon all my way,
The cheerless flakes and cold.
My heart shrinks in its hold,
And all the air is winter, sparse and wide.

Sweet, hath thy spirit seen
How the circled snowdrops grace
Thy coverlet of dainty ivy-green,
That robes that depth of rest
Beneath the low hill's crest,
Where sorrow broods as in a sacred place?

MY ONLY CHILD

Sweet, note the lilies' mound
  Daisy-bordered, and the moss
That holds their nurture dewy-bound.
  Thou wert more white than they;
  They will, like thee, decay.
I shall abide in bitter after-loss.

Sweet, I do joy herein,
  That the most of these fair flowers
Came from afar, nor all from thine own kin.
  Unfailing, year by year,
  Love rises, draweth near,
Lays his memorial wreath on thy dead hours.

Sweet, had I heart to muse
  Of thy olden secret now,
I 'd wonder whence that might thou wont to use;

So that, who came near thee,
Perforce must lovers be,—
Swayed like the wind-swayed leaves, I know not
how.

Sweet, sweet, O heart my own,
Whether frost or warmth betide,
Love still in this eternal faith is shown.
By these white gifts I say
She lives for me to-day;
I shall endure, for her who hath not died.

IN HUNGER

When am I hungriest for my love? When cold
Comes keenly forth, and grief in each snow-flake
Falls on me, and along the storm's drear wake
Lies a grim desolation as of old?
When am I hungriest? When the birds are bold
With summer's glee, and skim the laughing lake
For sport and glory? or when first heartache
Stirs at the wane of autumn's cereal gold?
I think that rather in sweet time of spring
I yearn for sight of her; when every tree
Questions with lifted leaves the gentle sun:
For then she lay, a strange mysterious thing
Drawn on unto the birth so near to be;
And love throbs deep within me, new begun.

IN MEMORY OF

AT ELVANFOOT

In the soft light of the far lingering day,
I had drawn nearer home, and thought to meet
The welcome of her lips in yon retreat
Where the low cliff stands shadowed, dark and grey.
But love's keen eyes had watched my later way;
And, long ere I kept tryst, the little feet
Came bounding from the hill, eager to greet
Me and my sport, and have me in delay.
Ah, me! And when my last day nearly ends,
And poor I come, and weary, in a light
Grown dim and distant, and the time is due;
Will she come joyously from her fair height,
And kiss me one long kiss for all amends,
And rest me, talking of dear old and new?

ANGEL OF DEATH

Angel of Death, if thou wilt bid me die
And close the record of these poor vain things,
Before thou lift me on thy windy wings,
Lower thine ear until my lips be nigh.
For now Nirvana waits me not, nor sky
Alien too much from this; but one who sings
Welcome in wonted song; where swifter springs
Call forth, and the exultant years reply.
Therefore I whisper thee, O last of friends,
Take me not far beyond the entry, where
The golden summits of the King may glow.
In the deep meadows I would find amends,
Her chant of love, and every restful air,
And kisses, and clasped hands, as we shall know.

IN MEMORY OF

O, IF SHE WERE RECLINING

O, if she were reclining
In that sequestered glen,
And I, her haunt divining
At last, should meet her then;

And all her elves and fairies,
Who love the softer shade,
Were chanting Salutaris
Around my little maid;

And if her thought, half sleeping,
Waked wide as I came near,
And she ran shouting, leaping,
Once more to father dear;

MY ONLY CHILD

What joy would sway in kisses,
  What heaven of close embrace!
What bliss above all blisses
  In touch of hand and face!

What words of far-pent story
  On lips that speak and sue!
O Love, O height of glory!
  What prospect, what review!

Ah, would she were reclining
  In that sequestered glen,
And I, her haunt divining
  At last, could meet her then!

IN MEMORY OF

MEETING

I was a suppliant to my sweet
(What time the summer drew so long),
That we far thence once more should meet
And stir anew the soul of song.

For many a day that soul had slept
In memory's cell too dark and dim;
But now the ancient wizard crept
Nearer, and bade me waken him.

(Whoso hath not been blithe at morn
With chant of birds; who never sings
A lay of love; is all forlorn,
And knows not the deep heart of things.)

Therefore I prayed, as was my due,
In vigils while the midnight wore;
In sacred vigils, till I knew
My darling had gone on before.

I followed swift by mount and plain,
By mellow strath and ruddy stream;
At time of sunset, through the rain,
I found the village like a dream.

How cheerful did the day slant on!
How fresh my feet to mount the glen!
The mountains laughed, the mists had gone;
I felt I should be happy then.

And instant, near the path, to right,
In shelter where the dews were wet,
That flower flashed on me wide and white,—
Her own fair flower,—and we had met.

IN MEMORY OF

All by itself (for none around
  Within far compass oped a cup);
Lonely to me alone; the ground
  Made reverence; I was lifted up,

And from my heart the wonted words
  Came forth, that had been mute so long.
I blessed her; and the pretty birds
  Stood still and listened to my song.

And down the glen a whisper stole,
  Half jubilant but half a prayer,—
A secret from her inmost soul;
  And now my song seems everywhere.

AT THE BORDER

What will it be when we meet,
We who have waited and yearned,
Once again blended, O sweet,
In the old cycle returned?

Haply, to touch thee, a sigh,
Such as befits the new-born;
Undulant murmurs that die;
Luminous mists of the morn.

Ours will be innermost joy
Winging around and above;
Glances that flash and are coy;
Delicate stresses of love;

IN MEMORY OF

Crescent from depths of delight,
Sinking and mounting along
Up to the shores of the night,
Billows of jubilant song.

Fain would I sail with thee far,
Through the wide dawn and the spring,
Where the celestial ones are,
Homed in the courts of the King.

There would we chant in the noon,
Hand in hand folded and fast;
Oh, that the time were come soon,—
Life with a welcome at last!

Thus may it be when we meet,
We who have waited and yearned;
Once again blended, O sweet,
Sweet in the cycle returned.

BUT YET

But yet, but yet,—ah, glory of the day
That circlest inward from that wider way,
Touching my heart at last with old delight,
Through every sense from every wonted site,
While, still the same, the glad air chants its lay!

How every glance is sweet for spring's sweet sway!
How the dead winter hides in its decay!
And joy will shut the portals of the night:
But yet, but yet—

Now every voice doth speak me fair and say,
Surely, 'tis well? And should I answer, Nay?
For not a whisper rises, clad in white,
Nor any moan makes answer from the height,
And the last wave just laps the sleepy bay:
But yet, but yet—

THE TEMPLE

There is a temple in my heart,
  Builded by Love (and I am his);
Safe from the world, it stands apart
  'Mid soft sounds and deep silences:
Thither I go alone, in white,
To watch and pray at morn and night.

High overhead, the mighty nave
  Brings solemn sense and tempered beams;
Far on, the pillars grand and grave
  Move to the window's picture-dreams;
'Neath which an altar and device
Await the soul's due sacrifice.

On either hand are chapels seven,
  Wherein by ordered turns I kneel;
And one unfinished, for that heaven
  Stayed the fair growth without appeal:
Round this, mute cherubim are set
With bowed heads, and their eyes are wet.

Nine pillars have I carvèd round
  With living memories of her way;
For such befit that sacred ground,
  So holy and so sweet are they:
Here I stand musing of my loss;
These are the stations of my cross.

Secure within the nether crypt
  Are gloomy shades she must not see;
For he who once Love's cup hath sipped
  Knows what the yearning soul must be:

IN MEMORY OF

Pure to the pure,—lest any sin
Cloud the clear vision entering in.

I have no litany nor chant
  Of certain form and tone withal;
I worship swayed by inward want,
  As that may shape the ritual;
My faith is but one little word,
The sweetest that was ever heard.

And as I tell my thought and deed,
  And what I would, and all her praise,
And lift my inward voice, and plead
  To see her from the altar-rays
Step forth and, in one act divine,
Mingle her very soul with mine:

What wonder if a glory falls
  Aslant upon the marble floor;

And airy music circles, calls,
Until, with reverent march before,
Her herald angels, silver-lit,
Sing the celestial introit?

And she so long remote, so long,
Brings me all heaven in her dear face;
And memory's exultant throng
Dies on the crest of our embrace;
And time fades far, and every sense
Widens beyond all evidence.

O beauties of the earth and sky,
O marvels of the azure seas,
O knowledge crowned with victory!
What are ye all, compared with these:—
The heart's lone temple; and the hour
Of prayer, and unity, and power?

IN MEMORY OF

FOREFELT

It hath been that, through some most lonely vale,
At time of winter and earth's silent plea,
A wayfarer comes sad, and late, and pale,
Where the full river merges in the sea.

And halted by the foam of that dim shore
(Like a bird poised upon a weary wing),
Sudden, amid deep thoughts of evermore,
Feels the first secret-secret waft of spring.

A breath, a touch, an instant of delight,
Scarce come when gone : but now the mourning limbs
Gather an ecstasy, and all the night
Hears the new summons of his joyous hymns.

MY ONLY CHILD

O thou who art my thought, O thou my love!
When I come, wandered far, in desert ways,
And life draws near its end, and all above
Or near me chills, and there are voiceless days;

Wilt thou not steal anigh with one soft kiss,
One, only one, immeasurably sweet,
To hint me of the change, the perfect bliss,
The longed-for land where thou and I may meet?

So that, however dark my years' decline,
Drear-touched and drawn inexorably slow,
The hidden joy of that new life divine
Shall sing within, without me as I go.

IN MEMORY OF

BIRTHDAY ELEGY

Hear me, ye streams, ye dewy dales,
  Through which the wilful waters flow;
Hear me, ye cool departing gales,
  That whisper to them ere ye go:

And thou, wide lake, upon whose breast
  All day the mists in reverie brood;
Thou mountain, round whose frozen crest
  The eagle sails in solitude.

Sadly I greet your silence, where
  The clansmen once in tumult strove;
And in this softly restful air
  Unload the burden of my love.

MY ONLY CHILD

For twenty-five have been the years
  Since she was born, my one sweet lamb;
And more than ten since her fair peers
  Received her back, and lone I am.

Half aimless now, as if in dreams,
  I wander forth and live forlorn;
And what I have strange sorrow seems,
  And hope wakes distant like the morn.

Alas, for every time of spring!
  Nature's new suppliant hands I see;
The landscape, like a living thing,
  Mutters her cycled death to me.

The rustling leaves, the timorous chants,
  The fairy steps that faintly stir,
And nested flower-buds, but enhance
  Mute memories and the loss of her.

IN MEMORY OF

Went we not on with mated hands,
  By flood and forest, mount and moor?
Did ever Love weave holier bands,
  Was ever prospect more secure?

Yet here, alone and spirit-tossed,
  I muse how time and joy may lapse;
I count the morrow come and lost,
  Eternity a dim perhaps.

O Love, lift up the veil, the veil;
  O send thy wind to misty skies;
Think not my heart would flinch or quail
  To see her with these human eyes.

Let it not be I wait too long,
  Till winter freezes every sense;
But waft to her her father's song,
  Where she dwells past all evidence:

Then bring but once her wonted feet
  Through every bond of time and space;
Give me the old delight complete
  To see my spring in her dear face.

REMEMBRANCE

II

Haply my course hath stirred some finer light
That, when this body sinks forlorn and sere,
May flash far on through many a changing year,
Across the orbit of the day and night.
In storm and stress I shaped my journey, right
Up to the time-bounds and the silent sphere.
I went alone, and felt no dint of fear;
Alone, for that my quest was infinite.
When I am dead, heed this. But let thy soul
Tend the sweet memory of my child, who knew,
Passing all knowledge, that dear love is best:
And while I fare for her to love's last goal,
Though to thyself the fresh sad toils accrue,
Think of the port, and her fair track to rest.

THE END OF THE YEAR

The year declines unto its dying day;
The snow's soft tresses mourn on every tree;
The faint light fades; rest bindeth all that be,
Save the slow wind that frets upon its way.
Save the slow wind and me, in whom delay
Mute memories of burgeoned spring, the glee
Of summer sun-shafts, and an autumn lea
Girt with rich brown and red, now white and grey.
'Tis the soul's pensive time; but yet within
I would not waning light, nor any cold,
Nor dreamy lapse of joys that once were true.
Lead on, O Death, if haply I may win
A forward life where swifter springs unfold;
And so to sweet Nirvana, overdue.

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